

# An Online Consumer Health Information Resource: 3-Year Usage Summary

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## Introduction

Partners Health Online<sup>1</sup> is an online consumer health information resource developed at Partners HealthCare System, Inc. Partners Health Online is a portal to a broad set of consumer health information. As such, the site allows public access to health and disease information as well as Partners-specific information resources (e.g., departments, physicians, clinical trials, classes, support groups). Partners Health Online licenses its health care articles from Healthwise, Inc. This poster describes patterns of activity at Health Online over a 3-year period. The data were analyzed in terms of traffic patterns, visitor characteristics, and information-seeking behavior.

## Methods

Health Online usage was evaluated as follows: Monthly WebTrends<sup>2</sup> report data for the years 2000 – 2002 were collected and analyzed. In addition to descriptive statistics for the 2000 – 2002 time period as a whole, the present work provides evidence of quarterly usage trends.

## Results

During the three years included for study, Health Online received an average of 2009 visits per week. Visits per week increased from an average of 483 during the first quarter of 2000 to 2,758 during the fourth quarter of 2002.

During any given month throughout the study period, most visitors (94%) visited Health Online once or twice, while the remainder visited more than twice. Monthly percentages visiting once or twice as opposed to more than twice showed no discernible trend over the three years included for study.

Most visitors (88%) spent fewer than five minutes at the Health Online site. This percentage increased from 80% during the first quarter of 2000 to 92% during the fourth quarter of 2002. Approximately 17% of visits occurred on Mondays. This percentage decreased with each day of the week through the weekend to approximately 12% each weekend day.

Visitor origins were analyzed first in terms of top-level domain types, then in terms of Partners

HealthCare vs. non-Partners origins. A majority (89%) of visits originated from the commercial (“com”) or network (“net”) top-level domains. Visits originating from the educational (“edu”) top-level domain accounted for 8% of visits overall, and showed a distinct trend over time. Namely, visits originating from the educational top-level domain decreased steadily from 34% of visits during the first quarter of 2000 to 4% during the fourth quarter of 2002. For 95% of visits during the study period, visitor origins could be classified as a Partners HealthCare or non-Partners entity. From the first quarter of 2000 through the fourth quarter of 2002, the percentage originating within Partners dropped from 20% to 1% or less, averaging 3% overall.

Half of all visitors to Health Online found the site via an external search engine. The top five search engines accounted for 92% of searches. These five were MSN, Google, AOL, Yahoo, and AltaVista. Search phrases were classified and analyzed to determine what type of information visitors were seeking. Dermatology (58%), Ob-Gyn (30%), Gastroenterology (4%), and Sexuality/STDs (2%) accounted for 94% of search phrases. The remaining categories (e.g., neurology, oncology, psychiatry) each accounted for less than 2% of search phrases. Where data were available, the most requested pages were the Health Online home page (53%), health and disease information (“Topics A-Z”, 14%), and the “Find a Doctor” page (6%).

## Conclusions

Partners Health Online received an increasing number of visits during the years 2000 – 2002. Over the same period, percentages visiting from the “edu” top-level domain or a Partners HealthCare entity decreased. Most visitors visited just once or twice per month, and spent fewer than five minutes at the site. Half of all visitors to the Health Online site arrived via an external search engine.

## References

1. <http://healthcare.partners.org/healthonline>
2. <http://www.netiq.com/webtrends/default.asp>